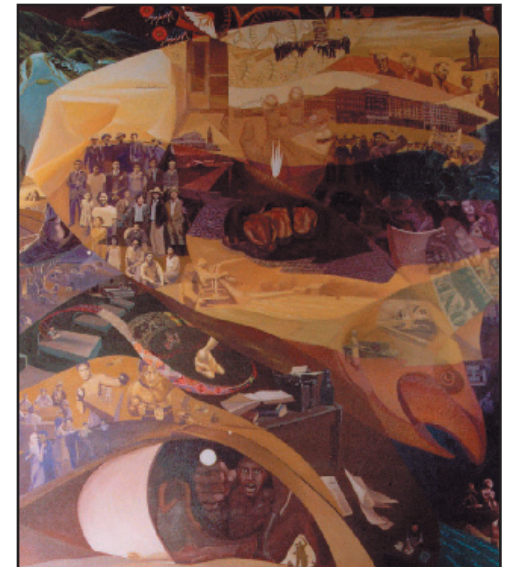


Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon - International District



Chinatown

Japantown

Little Saigon

International District

Urban Design Streetscape and Open Space Master Plan

February 2004

Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon - The International District

Urban Design Streetscape and Open Space Master Plan

February 2004

Produced for InterIm Community Development Association, a community based organization established in 1969 to better serve Seattle's International District.

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The consultant team was led by Nakano Associates and also included Edgar Yang Associates and Mayumi Tsutakawa. Kenneth Yeh provided technical assistance to InterIm's staff.

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Chong Wa Benevolent Association
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Little Saigon Business Development Association
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International Special Review District

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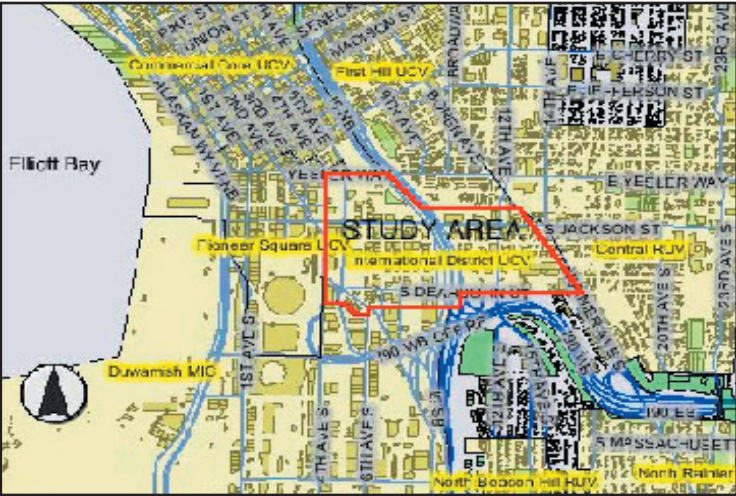


Gateways - Dragon Poles

Chinatown, Nihonmachi, Little Saigon - International District

Urban Design Streetscape and Open Space Master Plan

The Chinatown, Japantown (Nihonmachi), Little Saigon – International District Urban Design Master Plan focuses on the community planning district labeled in the 2002 Seattle Comprehensive Plan as the Chinatown/International District. This Downtown Urban Center is bounded approximately by Yesler Way, South Charles Street, Rainier Avenue South and 4th Avenue South. Please refer to the study area map found below. The Master Plan was prepared for InterIm and funded by the City of Seattle Department of Neighborhoods and the South Downtown Foundation.



Map of Neighborhood in the context of Downtown and surrounding communities.

Statement of Need and History

In 1997-8, this community went through a one year process to produce the Chinatown/International District Neighborhood Plan (see <http://www.ci.seattle.wa.us/npo/plans/id/>), which was adopted by City Council. The plan’s primary goal has been to help create a healthy, vibrant community. The plan, however, did not produce clear urban design guidelines that would enhance the community’s physical environment. Consequently, stakeholders from the District helped develop a Community Advisory Board to oversee a process that

would help facilitate the creation of the following document. As an aspect of the process, we examined streetscapes, intersections, and open spaces, specifically looking at issues such as lighting, trees, street furniture, public art, signage, and the street surface. We also looked at the issue of new construction, such as setbacks, retail spaces, and façade modulation, but we are planning to conduct a deeper analysis of this issue in the subsequent months after this report is created.

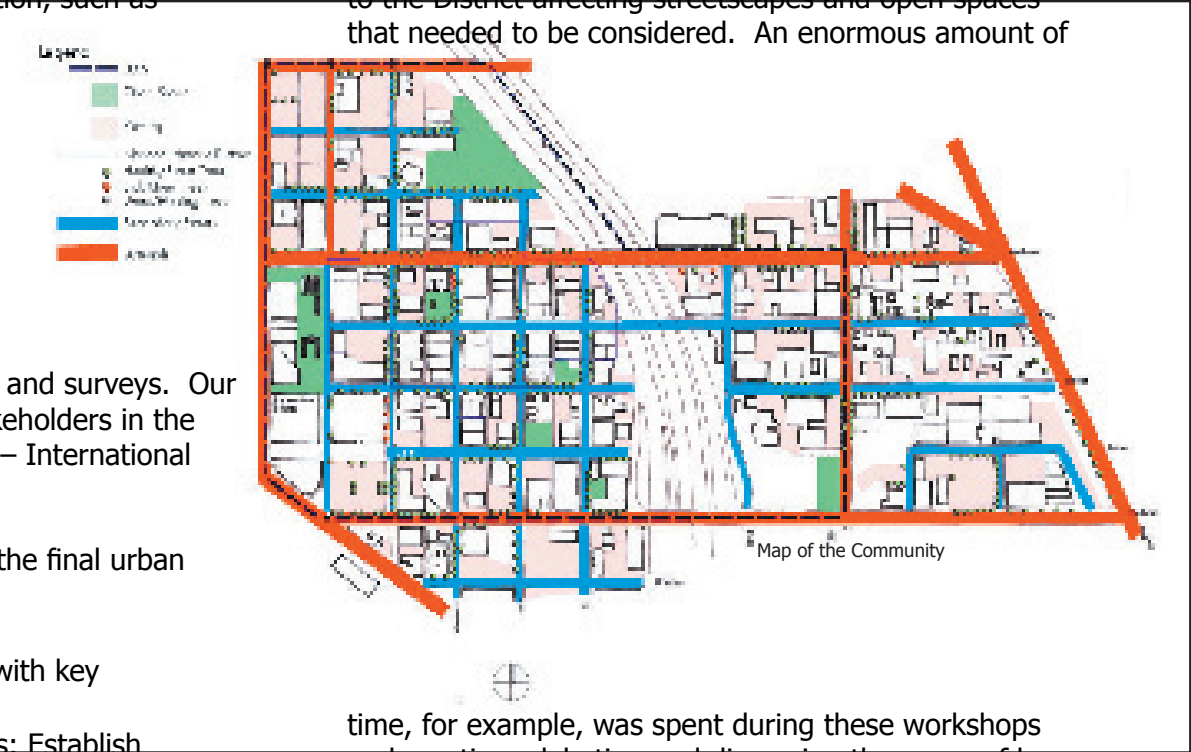
Process

Over 2002-2003, the Community Advisory Board was established to help develop a thorough outreach plan that included public workshops and surveys. Our goal has been to involve all key stakeholders in the Chinatown/Japantown/Little Saigon – International District area.

Five planning phases culminated in the final urban design report of January 2004:

- Preliminary: Design team meet with key stakeholders.
- Community Outreach/Workshops: Establish advisory committee; develop an outreach strategy; consultants prepare research and graphics; hold public workshops on the project’s goals, objectives, process, recommendations, and solicit feedback.
- Feedback/Workshops: Refine and draft outline of urban design report; prepare and conduct second community workshop.
- Final Public Presentation: Solicit feedback, incorporate public comment; produce draft urban design plan; hold public workshop.
- Final Urban Design Report.

The intent at the outset of this project has been to create a typical streetscape and open space plan for the District. However, it quickly became evident through community workshops and advisory board meetings that there have been many contributing issues specific to the District affecting streetscapes and open spaces that needed to be considered. An enormous amount of



time, for example, was spent during these workshops and meetings debating and discussing the name of the District and project. The crux of this issue seemed to be about defining community identity, the base from which design of public spaces, to a large extent, should originate.



Community Workshop

The Vision and Goals

The Chinatown/Japantown/Little Saigon—International District Urban Design Master Plan aims to provide a guiding vision the community can use in building healthy, safe, and lively public spaces that honor the past and reflects the vitality of the people living there today. It is a synthesis of ideas and discussions coming from community workshops, past plans, on-site surveys, University of Washington (UW) students, UW faculty, Community Advisory Board, examples from other cities and neighborhoods, and professional expertise. The master plan is one stepping stone in the on-going process of place making and should be revised by the community as it grows and changes.

This Plan is guided by five main principles:

- The public right-of-way that makes up our streets and sidewalks is an enormous public resource. This space should be beautified for the benefit of the community, which could also help facilitate economic development.
- Streetscapes and open spaces should facilitate community building - the healthy interaction of people in a neighborhood - which includes incorporating community events in these spaces and getting the community involved in the planning of these public spaces.
- Sidewalks and paths should facilitate pedestrian movement within the community, as well as to adjacent neighborhoods. Improvements must enhance the pedestrian environment, which includes exposing commercial activity to the street or on the street (sidewalk).
- The master plan is only one part of the community

planning processes that is on-going and changing as the community grows and transforms. It should provide a vision and a foundation, but should not be the only guiding instrument for streetscape and open space planning. The International Special Review District Guidelines, city codes, city planning, and community opinion should all be taken into account and should affect this change.

- The community should provide input in the design, construction, and maintenance of new projects. Building the capacity of community organizations and individuals to affect change should be ongoing.

This report begins with a description of the history, culture, and in-depth study of the different neighborhoods (sub-communities) composing the District. Chapters on open space, streetscapes and public art follow. An architectural summary is included in the draft. This section will recommend the process in evaluating the current community design guidelines. The report ends with suggestions for pilot projects. A bibliography and appendix is also included.

Place, History, and Culture



Girl looking out from Ocean City



Union Station's Great Hall



Lion Dance on the International Station Bus Plaza

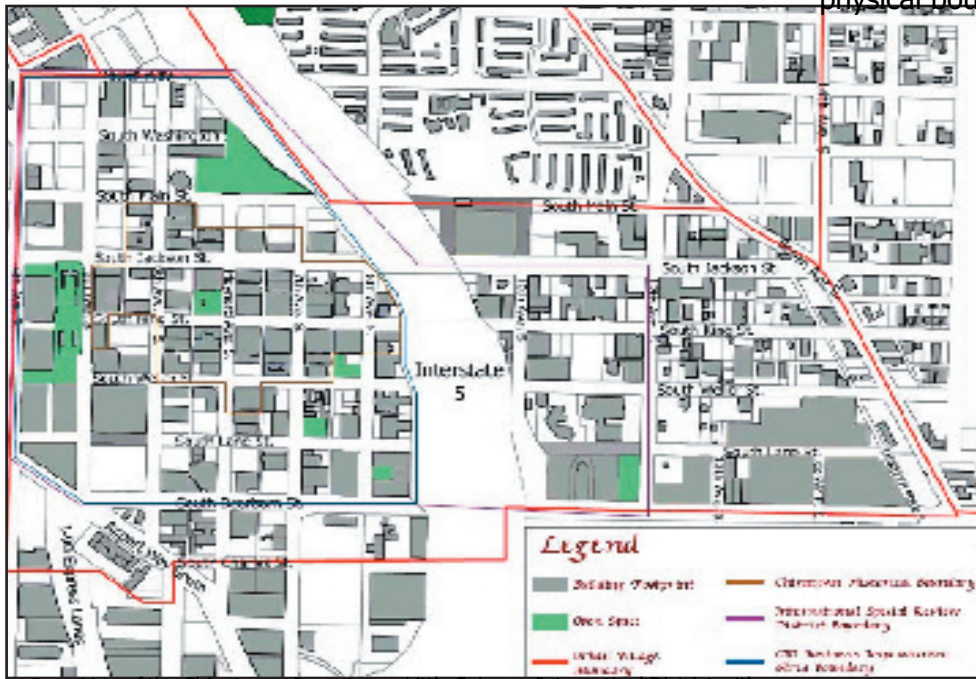
Chinatown, Nihonmachi, Little Saigon - International District
Urban Design Streetscape and Open Space Master Plan

Place

The Chinatown/Japantown/Little Saigon – International District Community is located in Seattle’s South Downtown area. The neighborhood boundaries and the urban design plan’s study area are roughly defined by Yesler Way to the north, South Charles Street to the south, Rainier Avenue South to the east, and 4th Avenue South to the west. Chinatown/Japantown/Little Saigon – International District Community are at the crossroads of many other neighborhoods, bordering Pioneer Square and the Commercial Core to the west, First Hill (including Yesler Terrace and 12th Avenue Planning Area) to the north, Central District (includes Judkins Park and Jackson Place) to the east, Greater Duwamish, Beacon Hill and North Rainer to the south.

The map below shows the various other jurisdictions within the neighborhood planning boundaries, outlined in red. The Seattle Chinatown National Register Historic District outlined in orange-brown, the International Special Review District's borders are demarcated in blue, and the Chinatown-International District Business Improvement Area is marked in green.

What makes this community's physical boundaries more complicated is that certain City departments, including the police department, divide the community into two distinct areas at the I-5 Freeway. Furthermore, on some maps, Little Saigon is excluded from the area designated as downtown, while the eastern part of the community is included on other maps. The sense of place is consequently a difficult task to handle, considering that this community has so many interpretations of what composes the area's physical boundaries.



Base Map of the Chinatown, Japantown, Little Saigon - Internatinal District with the BIA's, Chinatown Historical, Urban Village Boundaries

History of an Asian District

The greatest opportunity in the District is the strength of community and the rich cultural heritage and resources found there. A short history of the neighborhood is included for those not familiar with it, for it will provide a more complete picture of this community beyond what is obvious at the surface level. The following are the contributing resources: from Seattle's International District: *The Making of a Pan-Asian American Community*, by Doug Chin David Takami's *Divided Destiny: A History of Japanese Americans in Seattle*, and *Filipinos, forgotten Asian Americans : a pictorial essay, 1763-circa 1963*, by Fred Cordova. These books are excellent resources for those interested in learning more about the individuals, politics and



1937 - Tokiwa Hotel (Current name - Evergreen Hotel)

history of the neighborhood.

"Established at the turn of the twentieth century, (the International District) is one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. A major portion of the International District is on the National Register of Historic Places, primarily because it was the earliest settlement area for Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos in Seattle. . .

This is the community where different Asian immigrants settled, lived, worked and established businesses and institutions side by side. This is the area where the East met the West, where Asians collided among themselves and with the outside society. The District was originally a very steep hill back when Seattle's early pioneers first settled there. . . That was in the very early days of Seattle when the tide flats reached Fifth and Jackson Streets, and before the area was regraded, sliced to half its original elevation.

The days are long gone when the area was filled with hotels and boarding houses occupied by single immigrant men. . . when gambling, lotteries, gambling

dens and night clubs ruled. . . when Japanese restaurants, bathhouses, pool halls and boarding houses crowded Main Street. . . when trolleys ran up and down Jackson and Yesler Streets. . . when the Japanese community flocked to the Nippon Kan to listen to the “red” and “white” teams debate the latest issue. . . when crowds hurried to the only Chinese opera house in the area. . . when families grew bean sprouts in the basements of buildings. . . when open fruit and vegetable stands clustered the wooden sidewalks of Jackson Street. . . when jazz filled the night air. . . when Bruce Lee operated a kung-fu studio.

This is the most successful experiment in pan-Asian Americanism on the U.S. mainland, where the development of Asian American identity and character has made great strides.

1925 picture of 7th Avenue between Main and Washington Street. Currently, it is part of Kobe Terrace Park and the I-5 freeway



The International District is uniquely the only area in America where Chinese, Japanese and Filipinos settled and grew together, at most times cooperatively, with tolerance, but at other times much less so. (However) for much of its history, the District has been largely

isolated, abandoned, neglected and left on its own without much interest or assistance from City Hall or the rest of Seattle. . .

Once the primary settlement area for different Asian immigrants and a refuge from the difficult and cruel outside world, the District grew from the interwoven stories of these different groups. Over the years, the area evolved as the regional center for Asian American culture in Washington State. The District is now the residential area in which Asian Americans remain the majority and where Asian American commerce and culture predominate. Even with the new upscale development within and adjacent to the District, the area is where many new Asian immigrants still come to start their quest of the American dream.” – Doug Chin, historian.

“The real estate covenants and employment discrimination had the effect of creating a large and lively ghetto in the south end of downtown Seattle, called Nihonmachi or Japantown. The origins of Nihonmachi go back to 1891, when a city map showed that Dearborn Street was called Mikado Street.

These included restaurants, barbershops, bathhouses, laundries, hotels, bakeries, meat and fish markets, Japanese general merchandise stores, tailors, dentists, physicians, interpreters, and cigar and candy stores.

Into the 1920’s and 1930’s , more families set up small businesses in Nihonmachi. In many ways it was a like a small town. Everyone knew everyone else... The neighborhood was always busy, especially on weekends, when farmers and laborers would come into town from the countryside.

The center of Nihonmachi was 6th and Main. During the bon odori festival, a bandstand for musicians was constructed in the blocked-off intersection. Main Street from 5th to Maynard was closed for the dancing, and shop owners hung colorful Japanese lanterns outside their doors. At other times of the year, the neighborhood could have been any town in Japan... Passerby spoke Japanese. After dark, men strolled about in yukata and geta (wooden slippers) to the strains of shamisen from nearby restaurants or music schools.” Takami

“While Pinoys in the East concentrated in Metropolitan centers like New York City and Chicago. Pinoys in the West settled must in rural areas, particularly the San Juaquin, Sacramento, and Salinas Valleys in California. But Pinoy urban areas began to develop in Stockton, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Honolulu, and Seattle. Ghetto Pinoy districts developed “Manilatowns” of restaurants, barbershops, pool halls, gambling casinos, dance halls and other “recreational” haunts, bordering “Chinatown” and Tenderloin enclaves. The journey of Pinoys ended there. These pioneering Filipino-Americans were restricted from the “more respectable” quarters of the surrounding white community.” Cordova

Community Identity

As in many ethnic communities, including several U.S. Chinatowns, many immigrant families moved away from the Chinatown/International District after becoming more established in the US. The District, however, is still considered the economic and cultural hub for several Asian ethnic groups. Although they may live or work in other neighborhoods, many Puget Sound Asians will visit Seattle’s Asian historical community for special holidays and events, as well as to shop and eat. Although goods and services continue to be Asian oriented, the ownership and customer base is expanding to include a

variety of ethnic groups.

It is important to many of the residents and business owners that the cultural and historical character be preserved and built upon as a way to strengthen community identity. Many people, however, view that certain Asian design elements can lose their cultural and historic roots and become repetitive and superficial symbols rather than integral to the working of the neighborhood. In some situations, Asian design elements are used as a marketing ploy to attract tourist and to revitalize a community. The community must, consequently, be involved in the development of public art projects, signage, and have access in making comments regarding new developments. If the community is fully involved in incorporating elements that express community identity, then these projects will have more success in being interpreted as authentic and genuine to the place. In addition, the language in the International Special Review District guidelines encourages Asian oriented businesses and Asian oriented signage within this community. In sum, the identity of this community will only strengthen, as we continue to honor the history of cultural areas within the neighborhood through sensitive streetscape, public art, and open space design elements.

Review of Past Planning Efforts

Since this plan is intended to be a stepping stone – one in a series of public planning efforts – it is important to review where we have already been. Planning and preservation efforts began in the District, as early as 1968. All subsequent reports reflect similar issues to those we face today; concerns about new development,

crime, decay of historic buildings, and loss of businesses and residents.

International District: A Planning Report for Seattle's International District

Date: Circa 1968

Prepared for the Seattle Model City Program

The report sums up the primary concern in this quote, "The district is in a dilemma: it is losing people, hotels, business; it is being subjected to intensive land speculation; and within a few years it could be severely impacted by the King County Stadium." Suggestions include new zoning, parking, pedestrian connections, and ideas to revive the failing business district.

The International District, Seattle: An Action Program for Physical Development

Date: 1973

Prepared for the International District Improvement Association

The plan contained similar concerns and recommendations as the 1968 plan. It focused again on issues of new development related to stadiums, concerns about businesses in decline, and lack of families and young people in the District. Suggestions focused on developing pedestrian connections, improving alleys, reviving the business area, renovating existing housing, and creating new housing.

International Special Review District: Design Reports and Development Regulations

Date: 1976

Prepared for the International Special Review District

This report had similar concerns as the first two reports. The document established design guidelines for the International Special Review District which became part

of Seattle Zoning Code. Retaining and strengthening the King Street Retail Core as a way to attract residents back to the District was identified as a goal.

Chinatown/International District Strategic Plan

Date: 1998

Prepared for the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods

This plan is intended to be a reference of public opinion and planning efforts for this neighborhood to guide all city departments and the Seattle Comprehensive Plan. It has similar goals as the previous plans including improving cultural and economic vitality, providing housing, and safe, lively and accessible streets and public spaces.